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## THE CASINA OF PLAUTUS AND THE *ÞRYMSKVIÐA*

There is a striking similarity between the plot of the *Þrymskviða* of the *Edda Sæmundar* and that of Plautus' *Casina*. To readers unfamiliar with the Latin comedy a brief résumé will suffice to make the resemblance clear:

Lysidamus and his son are both in love with a slave girl in the household. In order to possess her, each urges her marriage with his own servant, expecting thus to conceal his passion from the other and from the remainder of the family. The wife of Lysidamus, however, naturally favors her son's suit and determines to do all in her power to thwart and humble her husband's amorous and wrongfully-directed passions. After much quarrelling as to which servant shall take the bride, lots are finally drawn which fall upon Olympio, servant of the master; Chalinus, servant of the son, angry and disgruntled, determines to be revenged, especially since he overhears a conversation which convinces him that it is Lysidamus himself, who really desires the girl, Casina. With the help of Lysidamus' wife, her maid and a neighbor, a trick is invented by which Chalinus disguises himself in the bride's clothing and takes her place in the marriage with Olympio, without being discovered. Only when the "bride" is carried to a neighbor's house is the trick disclosed, and both slave and master retreat from the nuptial couch, bruised and frightened, not knowing where to turn from shame, on account of the severe drubbing which the bride has given them each in turn as they attempt to caress her. The conspirators then taunt Lysidamus and Olympio till they are completely humbled. The girl Casina, who does not appear in the play, proves to be free-born, and marries the son of the house.

With this clear resemblance of plot, it will be advantageous to collect the points of similarity. They may be listed as follows:

1. A man dresses in woman's clothing.
2. He takes the part of a bride.
3. Revenge on the bridegroom is the motive in the end.

4. Other friends dress the supposed bride and form a group of conspirators.

5. The bride is supported in the scene by a companion: In the *prymskviða* by Loki, disguised as a maid, and in the *Casina* merely by a servant girl, Pardalisca.

6. Prymr and Lysidamus show the same nervous haste over the wedding preparations, and use similar endearments about the bride in commenting upon her uniqueness.

7. The "bride" hardly conceals his desire to spring upon his enemy.

8. The ardent bridegroom asks for a kiss and is much astonished in consequence: In the *Casina* by the touch of a beard, in the *prymskviða* by the red eyes beneath the bridal veil.

9. The wedding ends in the complete annihilation of the bridegroom and his party: In the *Casina* by the humiliation, mental and physical, of Lysidamus, in the *prymskviða* by the destruction of the race of giants.

In order to consider the *Casina* as a possible source of the *prymskviða*, we must examine the early Middle Ages for proofs that Plautus' works were not unknown in that period. It is a mistaken idea that Plautus was forgotten at the close of the Roman empire and in the Merovingian period. Although his plays were no longer acted, there is evidence to show that they were still read by a literary public.<sup>1</sup> Saint Hieronymus<sup>2</sup> turned to Plautus for solace, saying, "Post noctium crebas vigilias, post lacrimas, quas mihi praeteritorum recordatio peccatorum ex imis visceribus eruebat, Plautus sumebatur in manus." Likewise Eusebius praises him,<sup>3</sup> and Appollinaris Sidonius<sup>4</sup> says:

Et te tempore qui satus senero  
Graios, Plaute, sales lepore transis.

We have reason to believe that the comedies survived the barbaric invasions, as Du Méril<sup>5</sup> dates a Plautus MS. of the

<sup>1</sup> Karl v. Reinhardstoettner: *Plautus, Spätere Bearbeitungen plautinischer Lustspiele*, Leipzig, 1886, pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ad Eustochium de virginitate servanda*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Villalobos, *Bibliot. de autores españoles*, XXXVI, 461.

<sup>4</sup> *Caii Sollii Appollinaris Sidonii Arvernorum Episcopi opera, Carmen XXIII*, 147, Hanoviae, 1627.

<sup>5</sup> *Origines latines du théâtre moderne*, publiées et annotées par M. Edélestand Du Méril, Paris, 1849, p. 32.

British Museum as belonging to the tenth century. Manitius, speaking of Radbod of Utrecht's homily on Liafwijn,<sup>6</sup> quotes a passage referring to Plautus, which shows that he was known in the Netherlands even before Notker. The fact that Vitalis, whose *Amphitryon* goes back to Plautus, wrote at the close of the tenth century<sup>7</sup> is further evidence that Plautus was known in Western Europe in the early Middle Ages.

At the close of the eighth century, the western continent, England and Ireland were overrun by Norse invaders, 789 being the first recorded date of a fleet appearing off the Dorset coast. The attacks upon Ireland commenced in Dublin Bay in 795, and for twenty years continued on the south, west and north coasts. By 825 the Northmen had penetrated far inland, and in 853 Olaf the White was king over all Ireland. On the continent the invasion spread from three distinct centers. First, the mouth of the Scheldt. The Danes early settled the island of Walcheren, and from this point raided eastward to the Rhine and westward to the Somme. The region of the Seine was occupied in a similar manner, serious attacks by the invaders beginning about 841. Third was the mouth of the Loire and the island of Noirmontier. Upon the continent, the raids were almost entirely of a hostile nature, while in England and especially in Ireland the Danes finally settled down in fairly peaceful relations with the very people whom they had overrun, and were in their turn influenced by the literary culture of the Irish monks.<sup>8</sup> Even before the Viking period, Scandinavian trade with Ireland had begun, and the influence of Irish art is plainly seen in Norse ornamental work.<sup>9</sup>

Zimmer<sup>10</sup> points out that there was a strong counter influence exercised by the Irish upon their conquerors and that

<sup>6</sup> Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, in Iwan Müller's *Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, p. 604.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Cloetta, *Beiträge zur Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, Halle, 1890, I, 73.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. Bugge, *Studien über die Entstehung der nordischen Götter- und Heldensagen*, transl. by O. Brenner, München, 1889.

<sup>9</sup> Gummere, *Germanic Origins*, New York, 1892, p. 219.

<sup>10</sup> *Die Romanischen Literaturen und Sprachen mit Einschluss des Keltischen*, in *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, Berlin, 1909, p. 64.

the Scandinavian prose saga was probably an Irish genre. The influence of the Scandinavians upon the Irish has frequently been referred to by scholars.<sup>11</sup> Since Irish civilization was the more advanced, it is only natural to find Irish culture superseding that of the Danes and drawing the newcomers to it. At the time when the Vikings came to Ireland, Irish monasteries were the centers of classical learning, and classical authors, such as Vergil, were studied assiduously.<sup>12</sup> Through the Irish monks, the Danes undoubtedly came into contact with classical literature, including Plautus, though it must not be supposed that the Latin comedies were acted before them, or that they saw the MSS. It is most probable that Plautus' comedies and Latin poems in general were translated by the monks into Irish prose, and transmitted to Irish and Danish audiences in the form of prose sagas.<sup>13</sup> Such a theory would not be opposed to that concerning the date generally given for the composition of the *Þrymskviða*, and which Mogk states to be about 900.

The plot of the disguised bride does not occur in Western European literature in any form which does not go back to Plautus<sup>14</sup> or to the *Þrymskviða*,<sup>15</sup> the *Casina* and the Eddic song being the only independent plots of this nature. We can, then, be fairly certain that the *Þrymskviða* is not of old Scandinavian origin, but was introduced and incorporated into the Thor legends during the Viking period by reason of Scandinavian contact with Western Europe, i.e., probably Ireland.

EDITH SMITH KRAPPE

*Iowa City, Iowa*

<sup>11</sup> Cf. H. Zimmer, *Nennius Vindictus*, Berlin, 1893, pp. 212-213.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Kuno Meyer, *Learning in Ireland in the Fifth Century and the Transmission of Letters*, Dublin, 1913.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Cloetta, pp. 70 and 118.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Reinhardstoettner, pp. 365 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mogk, *Pauls Grundriss*, II, 591 ff. Also Arfert, *Das Motiv der unterschobenen Braut in der internationalen Erzählliteratur*, Diss. Rostock, 1897. Arfert, p. 51, has already suggested the possibility of the *Casina* as the source of the *Þrymskviða*.